RESTORATION REVIEW

Leroy Garrett, Editor

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"Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." —*Matt. 18: 3, 4* *New American Standard Bible*

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The Church of Christ: Yesterday and Today. . .

THE PATTERN FOR THE CHURCH

It is common to hear our folk talk about restoring the New Testament church, but this is hardly a defensible position in the light of the scriptures. Which congregation is it that we are to restore? Surely not Corinth, hardly Jerusalem or Ephesus or Sardis or Thyatira. Not even Thessalonica or Philippi, for we know too little about such congregations for them to constitute a pattern. Even all the congregations combined hardly compose a pattern in the sense of providing a blueprint for the work, organization, and corporate worship of the community, for these churches differ too much in these respects. We can come up with description but hardly prescription. Nor do the scriptures anywhere suggest that the various churches are to be imitated. The contrary would be nearer the truth for the scriptures sit in judgment upon the churches, censoring them for their failures. The scriptures come close to saying: don't be like Corinth, don't be like Ephesus, etc.

The idea that we are to be like the primitive Christians should therefore be qualified. Our problem may be that we are too much like them already! Sometimes they are exemplary, sometimes not. Even the apostles occasionally show weaknesses, and we have the likes of Demas, and Diotrephes, Hymenaeus, and Alexander. Paul described the Corinthians as carnal and Jesus said the Sardisians were dead. It is comforting that they were still addressed as "the Body of Christ" and "the church." It answers the fallacy that problems are to be solved by starting another church. The scriptures do not so direct. They were rather written to provide for mid-course correction, not to call the faithful out.

So no man or group of men in the scriptures is the pattern, except Jesus himself. It is only of Jesus that the Bible says, "leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps." Even Paul invites disciples to follow him "as I follow Christ." The church is always to point to Jesus, not to tradition or private interpretations. The purpose of all scripture and all God's work in history is "to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1:10). God's intention for all of us is that we might be "changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor. 3:18).

Our ultimate glory is that "when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 Jo. 3:2), and in becoming "like him" we shall receive a body like his, as Phil. 3:21 promises: "who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body." We are, therefore, to be like Jesus in both spirit and body. So God intends, and the purpose of all scriptures is to hold up the Christ "as a plan for the fullness of time." Our reason for studying the Bible, therefore, is to see from its teaching how we are to become more and more like Jesus.

But we have not fully answered our question as to what is the pattern for the church in all its functions. Jesus is the ultimate pattern and the final authority for us all individually in our own private lives, and this of course goes far in identifying the church's direction. But a congregation's goal in terms of corporate worship, organization, and mission is another matter. Each church is, of course, to exemplify Jesus in all that it does, for this is what it is all about, but can we be more specific in identifying a pattern for the details of its functions, if indeed, there is a pattern?

A pattern (or norm) does emerge out of the literature of the Christian communities. While no one church, or all of them together, constitutes the way for our congregations today, there is "the ideal church" (if that isn't putting it too strong) that surfaces in the scriptures. An illustration would be a business firm that has a far-flung sales force. As problems and contingencies arise the executives send directives and corrections to the various salesmen. With all such documents in hand, one could get a good idea of what the company believes to be "the ideal sales force," even though no one office (or all of them together) measures up to it. Some may get stern rebukes or encouraging praise, or both, but in it all there emerges something close to the ideal, even if all the offices fall far short of it. Our long years of experience in education gives us a notion of the perfect teacher, though no one measures up to it. Plato built his philosophy around the concept that all particulars are shadowy reflections of the perfect. In a similar way we can see the perfect church, even in the congregations in the Bible, as reflected in the literature written to them and about them, imperfect though they be.

The Jerusalem community may never have seen the universal nature. of the church, but Acts 1 10 gives us an exciting story of a growing church, and such guidelines as Acts 5:42 surely serve to monitor our churches: "Every day in the temple and at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ." We gain still more insight from Acts 4:32: "The company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own."

Corinth may be the most rebuked of all, but despite its imperfections it gives us significant understanding of what God's people should be. Its evangelism, for example, reached to the farthest corners of degradation. 1 Cor. 6:9-11 shows that some of them had been idolaters, homosexuals, thieves, drunkards, and the like. "But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God." That shows that we should be reaching out to such ones and not be so concerned for our image. There is hardly an end to the information in the Corinthian letters about what the church should and should not be.

So it is all through the New Covenant scriptures. The Galatians had some serious hangups about the law, but that problem was the occasion of Paul saying things about freedom that continues to challenge the church, such as Gal. 5:13: "You were called to

freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another." The problem of the Hebrew believers of reneging their faith for the old order netted for us precious truths on what the church should do and be, such as: "Exhort one another every day, as long as it as called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." (Heb. 3:13). We don't know much about the churches at Philippi and Thessalonica, but thank God that they are examples of "joy inspired by the Holy Spirit" (1 Thess. 2:7) and "God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

These references indicate how we can search the scriptures for that emerging ideal of the church. John Stott does this with the seven churches of Asia in his *What Christ Thinks of the Church*, which could be as easily entitled *What Christ Wants the Church To Be.* What he does *not* want goes far in telling us what he *does* want.

There are problems to be sure in this approach, especially if one supposes that all this literature will yield an array of details that answers all questions about organization, worship, and work. The Bible is simply not a "Sec. 1, Art. 5" kind of guide. We have but little information about some things that concern us, whether it be social responsibilities, kind of organization (such as the way to appoint elders, how many, and precisely what for), or educational obligations. There is much that we think we need to know that the Bible says nothing about.

But we do have some information about all these things, and there are numerous principles that guide us in those areas where details are lacking. How much, for instance, does such a principle as "let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding" (Ro. 14:1 9) teach us in filling in a lot of the blanks—and how many woes would it spare us if heeded?

Because it is the kind of book it is, the Bible is subject to varying interpretations, or, to say it another way, we are prone to fill in the blanks differently. Here love must rule and differences tolerated, which gives meaning to forbearance as a virtue. People who are whipped into conformity, falsely called unity, have no occasion to forbear.

It was the recognition of this problem that led our forebears to the motto "In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, love," which makes a lot of sense. If by "essentials" we mean those things necessary for life in the Son (being itself, not well-being), and by nonessentials those things more or less important to the enhancement of that life, where so many of our opinions and deductions come in, we will have to restrict ourselves to those things "clearly and distinctly set forth in scripture.

This kind of pattern calls for a central core of faith, such as the seven ones in Eph. 4, and yet allows for that diversity that makes for our own unique growth rather than the stagnation that would come from "jot and tittle" patternism. So it is just as well that God in His wisdom has given us the pattern rather than fearful men who are threatened by blank spaces to be filled in, however many principles there are to guide them.—*the Editor*

The unexamined life is not worth living.—Socrates

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ALEXANDER CAMPBELL AND WATERGATE

Well, not *exactly* Watergate, but this account of one of Alexander Campbell's visits to Washington will serve to show that human depravity has been at work in our nation's capital for a long time.

I have recently noticed several references to the fact that Campbell had the rare experience of addressing both houses of Congress. Whether this is part of the nostalgia that is presumably sweeping the country, caused in part by a longing for an age of moral consciousness in these days of disillusionment, I know not. But this incident of speaking to Congress, along with the extravagant compliment paid Campbell by former president James Madison to the effect that if he should choose one person to represent the human race on a distant planet it would be the reformer from Bethany, are two of the better known incidents in his life.

The purpose here is to tell the story of that visit before Congress and to draw some parallels between the situation then and now.

It was a Sunday morning, June 2, 1850. Uncle Alex had gone east to visit congregations in Baltimore and Washington. He had long promised the saints in Baltimore that he would give them a week of "lectures" (he *never* called this kind of work *preaching)* if and when they built a commodious building. Now that they had a house that would seat upwards of 800, still a rarity within the Movement, he went there to fill it to capacity, which he did. He hailed the building as "an architectural gem," and was quick to contrast its simple elegance with the ecclesiastical magnificence of the eastern religious establishment which prided itself on choirs and organs. The Movement did not yet have a congregation with an organ, not quite!

He summarized his week's work in Baltimore with at least one unfamiliar reference: "Some demons were dispossessed, some Christians were edified, a few penitents were baptized, and all the Christians present were happy."

It was while in Baltimore that "a very pressing invitation" came for him to address a joint session of Congress. In response to this he took "the cars" to Washington, accompanied by about 20 brothers and sisters who came along for the big event. He arranged for two hours of meditation in a private home before proceeding to the house chamber. When he arrived he found the chamber overflowing with representatives and senators with their families, along with many citizens of the community. There was a hymn and a prayer, and he was introduced by Rep. Phelps of Missouri.

What was the moral and political climate in the capital in the summer of 1850? The *big* issue was annexation of new land, and this was big because it was tied to the slavery question. Texas had become the 28th state only five years before, but only after bitter quarreling. Henry Clay had lost the presidency almost certainly because of his opposition to admitting Texas or any other western territory, for he was convinced that they would be slave states and would encourage further importation of slaves. As New Mexico and California became territories, it was only with Clay's and other Whigs' protests, and their efforts to write in anti-slavery clauses failed. The nation obviously wanted everything between the two great oceans, and the moral climate was such that the people were willing for their leaders to do most anything to get it.

Henry Clay, you will remember, presided over the Campbell-Rice debate in 1843, and in 1847, when Campbell left for Europe, he voluntarily sent along a letter introducing him to dignitaries. Clay served in both houses of Congress, was Secretary of State under John Quincy Adams, and ran for President three times, missing it once by only 39,000 votes. In Washington he was known as "the Great Pacificator" in that he did things like negotiate a peaceful settlement with South Carolina in 1832 when that state was on the verge of starting a civil war, and for authoring the Missouri Compromise in 1820, which allowed that state to enter the union as a slave state on the grounds that all other states entering the union above that latitude would be free forever, a move that eased tensions between North and South. At the time of Campbell's visit, Clay was surely sitting there as a senator, having only two years before been rejected by the Whig party as the presidential nominee, though he was the obvious party leader. But Gen. Zachary Taylor was a man of war, having been sent by President Polk into Texas and Mexico to "persuade" the Mexicans to sell us all their land between Texas and California, and it was understood that he was to spill blood, if necessary, to achieve his purpose.

Since the Whigs figured that the nation wanted expansion and annexation, even if that meant both slavery and war, they passed by the most qualified man and gave the nomination to General Taylor. It was not the hour for a man of peace like Clay, if it ever is.

Taylor had a “clean” political record, for at the time of his nomination he had never voted in his life! He was also a southerner who owned 300 slaves. No one knew his political beliefs, probably because he had none; but he was a war hero, a dubious war though it was. Not only was Henry Clay bypassed, but the fortunes of greats like Daniel Webster fared no better.

Had Uncle Alex gone before Congress just one year earlier, one Abraham Lincoln would probably have been in the audience, for he served in the House from 1847-49. It was he who stood in the chamber aisle and challenged President Polk, who was asking Congress to declare war on Mexico. Polk was claiming that American soldiers had been attacked and so he was asking for blood. Lincoln insisted that the President name the exact spot on which American blood had been shed. But the President wanted his war, as did much of the nation, and he got it. Despite warnings from the leaders of both parties to exercise restraint and wait at least until the Mexicans committed a definite act of hostility, he pressed his case, saying that “the cup of forbearance has been exhausted,” and got the declaration of war that made Gen. Taylor a hero by the slaughter of Mexicans.

But James Polk holds claims to fame other than warmongering. A governor of Tennessee, he was something of a protégée of “Old Hickory,” and was himself dubbed “Young Hickory.” Gen. Jackson was now the older statesman of the Democratic party, now retired to the Hermitage, but still active enough to campaign for the annexation of Texas on pro-slavery basis. When Jim Polk showed signs of being able to make it to the White House, Old Hickory insisted that he should marry Sarah Childress, one of his girl friends, so as to put an end to his lady-chasing activities. And he chose the right one for a Machiavellian prince, for she was very pious, not even allowing intoxicating beverages to be served at White House affairs. And she was probably as kind as she was exacting with Polk’s slaves. When one of the President’s own party wanted to write into any annexation bill a proviso that in the new territory “neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall ever exist,” Polk angrily retorted that such an amendment would be foolish and mischievous.

Feelings ran Watergate-deep in those days between the Whigs and Democrats, quarreling as they were about tariff, annexation, slavery and all the rest. While Polk was still in the House serving as Speaker, the bitterness sometimes became so rife that there were outbreaks of vile cursing. Even the normally peaceful Henry Clay came over from the Senate one day, and shouted at Speaker Polk from the gallery, crying out, “Go home, --- ---you! Go home where you belong!” (expletives deleted). Later back at Ashland in Kentucky when Clay heard that Polk had received the Democratic nomination he cursed in utter horror.

But Polk erred at one point as a Machiavellian statesman. He made a hero out of Gen. Taylor, who belonged to the opposite party, a hazard that the Italian philosopher pointed to with due assiduity. Polk knew better, and he tried to keep the Mexican War big enough to

serve his expansionist intentions but small enough not to produce any substantial heroes. And so, unwittingly, he created the next President.

These events bring us to 1850. General Zachary Taylor was in the White House at the time of Campbell's visit, but not for long, for he died only a few weeks afterwards, which was probably a blessing to the nation, for he was hardly qualified to preside over a nation that was coming apart at the seams. Millard Fillmore took office and almost immediately signed into law bills that Zachary opposed, thus postponing for a decade one of the bloodiest civil wars in world history.

Campbell's visit in June of 1850 came at midway point of the most intense and dramatic debate in congressional history, featuring the skill and oratory of Clay, Calhoun and Webster. Slavery had now overshadowed all other issues and dissension between North and South had reached frightening proportions. Texas was now part of the union as a slave state, and the South and the expansionists wanted all additional territories to be slave also. Only Oregon had been organized as a territory without slavery. No decision had been made about the great expanses of New Mexico, California, and Utah. The North insisted that all new territories be free; the South contended that slaves were property with constitutional protection.

The debate was so bitter and impossible as to defy description. Many compromises were put forth, such as drawing a line both ways, east and west, from Missouri to both oceans, declaring all north of the line free and all south slave. Another was to allow each new territory to decide for itself. Nothing worked.

It was the wisdom and oratory of Campbell's friend, Henry Clay, assisted by Calhoun and Webster, that saved the nation from collapse, at least temporarily, by pleading for a compromise plan that was eventually accepted. These men held the nation spellbound by their oratory. All three were to die within the next year or so, but it was those last flickers of the fire that burned so brightly in their souls that brought hope to a dying nation. Calhoun was too ill to speak himself, so his words were read, pleading with the North to be less agitating. It was on March 6 that Daniel Webster gave that famous speech in which he pled for the preservation of the union. A dying man, his magnificent voice was now abated, and yet he said with such splendor, "Peaceable secession is an utter impossibility."

The debate was still raging when the President died in July. A peaceful compromise was finally signed in September. Half way through the debate, in June, it was this Congress that sent an urgent appeal to the man of God from Bethany, one known to many of them for his part in the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1829, to address both houses on a Lord's Day morning.

On that beautiful Sunday morning, while some cherry blossoms were still in bloom, Alexander Campbell stood before the nation's lawmakers in the most perilous hour in the nation's history. It would have made Watergate look like a mock trial at Yale Law School.

But what he said on that occasion might well be seen in the light of what he would say to our nation today. And you can be assured that Alexander Campbell, acutely aware of the political situation in his day, knew exactly what was going on in Washington on June 2, 1850. He had understood the invitation to be urgent. He hastened to the capital from Baltimore early enough to go to the home of a brother Tingle for two hours of prayer, and then to the House chamber. He had been with his Lord and he was ready.

Reading almost certainly from his own *Living Oracles*, he began: "For God has so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes on him may not perish, but obtain eternal life. For God has sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world may be saved."

For 90 minutes he spoke on his favorite subject, the Divine Philanthropy, beginning with creation and outlining what God has done for man all the way to redemption in Christ. He discounted patriotism and political friendships as expressions of that benevolence, and called upon his audience to look to that providence that bestows a divine legislation. He pled for *Christian* morality.

He later described his 'audience as attentive and absorbed as any he had recently addressed, and he spoke of the legislators as "some of the greatest statesmen of the world."

Leaving the elegance and grandeur of the House chamber, Alex went across town to a meeting with a small band of disciples in an upper room, in company of several congressmen. He was impressed to find there the wife of the congressman that had introduced him to the lawmakers. "This excellent lady, unlike some other ladies of illustrious rank that visit Washington during the winter, is not ashamed to meet with the little flock in some upper room, and to participate with them the honors and blessings of the family of our exalted Lord," he wrote later in the *Millennial Harbinger.* And the joy he found in this little congregation pleased him, for though small and obscure they were happy to honor the holy ordinances on the Lord's day and to edify one another in love.

Now Uncle Alex stood before this small group of saints and spoke of the Lord's day and the Lord's family, wonderfully enjoying himself. In a matter of hours he moved from the eloquence of the halls of Congress to the humble sharing of saints in an upper room beyond the tracks. As Socrates would put it, in weighing the alternative of life and death, "and only God knows which is better."

That is part of the story of "Watergate" in Washington in the middle of the last century. And Alexander Campbell was there in the midst of profane, adulterous, divisive, wrangling, cursing, inept, warmongering, deceptive politicians, along with the wisdom and eloquence of the great men of the day. Same old sins, same old human nature. There is nothing new under the sun, not even Watergates.

And the church's message must always be the same, God's love sitting in judgment over human carnality. God so loved the world that he gave. . . The divine philanthropy! Such is our message to a nation that forgets God. And wherever there is a Watergate there is almost certainly the Body of Christ, however humble and obscure. On that remarkable June day in 1850 Alexander Campbell found both, and he found God in them both. From darkness to light, and all those who want light can and will find their way.—*the Editor*

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THE NATURE OF BIBLICAL AUTHORITY AND THE RESTORATION MOVEMENT

In 1837 when Alexander Campbell debated Bishop Purcell on Roman Catholicism, he spoke in his opening speech of defending "the great redeeming, regenerating, and enabling principles of Protestantism." Though there was no proposition in the debate dealing with the place of scriptures *per se*, except for the thesis defended by Mr. Campbell that mankind has the Bible quite independently of the Roman church, he does make explicit his view of the scriptures as authoritative. Sketching what he calls "the Protestant rule," as opposed to the Roman, he names seven attributes of the Bible. It is inspired, authoritative, intelligible, moral, perpetual, catholic, perfect. In attributing authority to scripture, he quotes John 12:48: "The word that I speak to you shall judge you in the last day."

While some heirs of the Restoration Movement have been critical of Campbell for defending Protestantism in that debate, there can be no question that he stood in the mainstream of classical Protestant thought in his view of scripture. Though he had his quarrel with the Westminster divines of 1647 in their creation of *The Confession of Faith*, it was not when they said: "The authority of the holy scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God, (who is truth itself), the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the word of God." And while Luther would not ascribe the Word of God to all the scriptures, Campbell would certainly agree with him that "both Popes and general councils of the Church can err and only the Scriptures are authoritative." And Calvin did not even go too far for Campbell when he wrote: "The scriptures receive full authority among the faithful by no other right than that they decided that the Scriptures have flowed down from heaven, as if the very words of God were there heard." To be sure, if the Bible was authoritative to Protestantism, it certainly was to Alexander Campbell.

Before I say more about the views of our founding fathers, I owe it to my audience, I presume, to set forth my own position on the nature of biblical authority, I am, after all, like most of you, a product of the Restoration Movement. Any conclusions that we might

reach in this study are to be drawn not only from the best thinking of our own past, but from our own application of mind, in reference to the most reliable biblical scholarship of our own day.

I take the position that the authoritative basis of our religion is centered, not in a book *per se,* but in a Person, the Founder of our faith and the Captain of our salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible describes him as the Word of God (Rev. 19:13), and that Word was an authoritative reality long before there were any New Covenant scriptures. And even the Old Covenant scriptures, which was the only Bible that the earliest Christians had, was (and is) accepted as authoritative in that Jesus set the seal of his own authority upon them.

"God spoke to our fathers in various ways and in different installments through the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us through his son," Heb. 1:1-2 assures us. The prophets were and are authoritative in that they spoke with a "thus saith the Lord," *ex cathedra,* as much as any ambassador with plenipotentiary authority would speak for the government he represents. This was true whether they wrote or not. Elijah and Elisha were the great non-writing prophets, but their words were as authoritative as those of Isaiah or Amos. It was the "thus saith the Lord" that counted, whether it was ever written or not. Thus the word of God given to Moses was heaven's authoritative Word while it existed in oral tradition as much as when it finally became literature, and I accept it today as part of "God has spoken," mainly because it was accepted as such by Jesus and his apostles.

Said the Lord: "Everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled. Then he opened their minds that they might understand the scriptures" (Lk. 24:44-45). "You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me" (John 5:39).

Since he is indeed the son of God, I believe Jesus when he says: "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth" (Mt. 28:18). Authority lies only in truth. Since God is ultimate truth, only He has absolute authority. This authority He has given to his son. It is to the extent that we discern this truth in Jesus in the scriptures that the Bible is authoritative to us. The scriptures of both Old and New Covenants are thus authoritative in that they reflect him and bear witness to his mission in this world.

This is to say that Jesus "reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature," and that it is only in the scriptures that this great truth comes to me and gives me life and light. He is thus my example and pattern, the norm by which I conform my life to God, which is what authority is all about. This is the case not only of his life and teaching and all that the Old Covenant scriptures say in anticipation of him, but also of the experience of the primitive church, the Acts and the epistles thus reflecting the experience of the community of believers growing in Christ-likeness. All these are authoritative in that they speak to me of Jesus.

This implies a distinction between relative and absolute biblical authority. Those portions of scripture that reflect the Christ with greater glory and reveal his will to me more explicitly are more authoritative. The Lord's prayer is thus more authoritative than the prayer of Nehemiah, and the gospel of John or the letter to the Ephesians is more authoritative than the Song of Solomon or the Book of Leviticus. The parables of Jesus and the letters of Paul speak to me with absolute authority, while the genealogies of Chronicles mean almost nothing in comparison. If authority is rooted in truth, we must remember that the scriptures give us truth ranging all the way from nil to crucial to life and light. No thinking Christian would contend, except perhaps in some indefensible theory of inspiration, that the dietary rules in Leviticus or the apocalyptic views of Zechariah are of the same authority as the Sermon on the Mount or Paul's love hymn of 1 Cor.13, even though all these fall under the general heading of the holy scriptures. All scripture may be truth, but obviously all scripture is not of the same importance, and consequently not of the same authority.

Interestingly enough, the Bible nowhere calls itself the Word of God. It rather says that "the Word of God came" to the great prophets of Israel and that it was finally "made flesh." The Word of God had already happened when the Bible came along, and yet we believe that somehow, as much as paper and ink can, it mirrors the mind of God and is thus scripture inspired of God (2 Tim. 3:16). William Robertson Smith, that great Aberdeen scholar, said it well in such an unlikely place as his own heresy trial: "If I am asked why I receive scripture as the Word of God, I answer with all the Fathers of the Reformed Church: Because the Bible is the only record of the redeeming love of God, because in the Bible alone I find God drawing near to man in Christ Jesus and declaring to us, in him, his will for our salvation, and this record I know to be true by the witness of his Spirit in my heart, whereby I am assured that none other than God himself is able to speak such words to my soul." (A. M. Hunter, *Bible and Gospel*, p. 3).

I am saying that the nature of biblical authority is that the scriptures grew out of God's authoritative dealings with man. The Bible is a record of man's experience in responding to God's overtures. I believe that God directed all this in such a way that we now have the scriptures He wants us to have and that they say to us what He wants them to say. This we can believe in spite of all the problems of canonicity. Even if the early church accepted some books that we now reject and rejected some that we now accept, we can believe that God's superintending hand has preserved for the continuing church the literature that is best for it.

But this cannot mean that all scripture, even that of the New Covenant, is equally important and authoritative. There is a reason why the early church questioned the place of Hebrews, James, 2 and 3 John, Jude, 2 Peter, and Revelation; and it was a long time before they gained and undisputed place in the canon. But Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the

Acts, and 13 epistles of Paul were never in dispute, for it is here that we have the heart of the Christian scriptures. We lose nothing in admitting that a book like Jude or 3 John is of *relative* authority, while Luke and Acts are of *absolute* authority. The difference lies in what they have to say to us in reference to the will of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Just as there is no comparison between what the Gospel of John and the Revelation of John does for one in bringing Jesus into focus. In the Gospel I read of the Lord's teaching about his own nature and his mission in this world, his meeting with people like the Samaritan woman, his prayer to the Father, and his eventual passion and resurrection. Whereas in the Revelation I am projected into a catastrophic world of fantastic and terrifying imagery that probably nobody really understands in our time. The nature of biblical authority has to be such that literature like the Gospel of John is of greater authority than the Revelation. The Gospel of John speaks to me in terms of what God wants me to do and to be; the Revelation, outside its first three chapters, says very little to me in this respect. And it is in doing and being that authority is all about.

Neither do I see it necessary to hold to a theory of absolute inerrancy of scripture in order to accept is as authoritative. The Bible is hardly a volume that has come to us through some kind of divine dictation and thus free of any kind of error. It is difficult for a thoughtful Christian to believe this. If it were true, it would make God responsible for every little mistake in scripture, such as in Mk. 2:26 where Abiathar is wrongly written for Abimelech, or *in* Mt. 27:9 where Jeremiah is given credit for something said by Zechariah.

We unnecessarily burden ourselves with the task of explaining all such discrepancies, as if the nature of biblical authority demanded this. Even though the scriptures make no such claim for themselves, we belabor the point and make a big deal out of explaining, with all sorts of gymnastics, "the alleged contradictions and discrepancies of the Bible." We even subject ourselves to the ordeal of working out "a harmony of the gospels." as if it were all one testimony. It does not seem to have occurred to us that if God had wanted us to have had but one gospel record, he would have provided us with just that rather than the fourfold view that He has given us. It is as if we missed the point of divine revelation, which has been given to us through earthen vessels and consequently has the mark of human imperfections.

A more moderate view than rigid inerrancy allows us to see the peculiarities and even the prejudices of the different writers. Even though "the beloved physician" almost certainly had Mark's account of the woman with a hemorrhage before him, he conveniently omitted that part that reflected on physicians. Dr. Luke no doubt felt that he could tell the story just as well without saying, "After long and painful treatment under various doctors, she had spent all she had without being any the better for it" (Mk. 5:26). Luke tells us only that "no one was able to cure her." But the doctor *does* tell the story, and with Jesus shining through as beautiful as ever.

I agree with the likes of T. H. Horne and Wescott & Hort that the inerrancy of scripture means that there is no *substantial* error in the Bible. There is no imperfection that materially affects its message or its great teachings. Witnesses to any event do not have to agree in every particular for their testimony to be valid. Indeed, it is the variations that indicate that there has been no collusion. It is not the medium that is the message, Marshall McLuhan notwithstanding, but in the case of the gospel story, whether it be in the Old Covenant scriptures where the story is potentialized or in the New Covenant where it is actualized, the message is the wonderful Person of the Bible. No error, no discrepancy, no contradiction even begins to blur the glorious story of who he is and what he means to us. If this is not inerrancy, it is what C. H. Dodd calls "cogent persuasiveness." This means that in the Bible there is a faithful record of the Master's voice. Like any recording device, there may be noises in the machine and needle scratches on the disk, but it is still the Master speaking and his voice is cogent and persuasive. Praise God that He has revealed His son to us, however frail and fallible the instruments through which He has done so!

There is another thing about the nature of authority, whether biblical or otherwise, and that is the more subtle it is the more deeply it cuts into our lives. Like some great painting or musical composition, it imposes itself upon us through its own internal character rather than by any arbitrary demands. This subjective aspect of authority cannot be overlooked. This is why some biblical passages that are associated with our own valleys of despair or peaks of joy, verses rooted deeply in our own dramatic vicissitudes, speak to us with such resounding authority. And this is why those same passages will not mean nearly so much to someone else. I remember whispering the assuring words of Philip. 4:13 to my very sick Mother as she was being wheeled into surgery. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." She was still repeating that great passage as she underwent the anesthetic. That verse now has to me a subjective ring to its authority.

The authority of a writer like Alexander Solzhenitsyn has this subtle element. He does not have to tell people that he is an authority on the life and times of the Russian revolution. And what one gets in reading *Cancer Ward* or *Gulag Archipelago,* or in hearing the novelist recount his experiences in a TV interview, is more than information. There is a person that comes through. There is a spirit that pervades it all, a subjective element, that gives it an authentic ring. It is an authority gained through suffering and involvement rather than one externally imposed. It is the kind of thing we all understand in such a judgment as, "The pianist's performance lacked authority," And such a judgment is sometimes made when all the objective and external features have been faithfully performed.

The authority of our Lord is like that. He never imposes himself or presses his claims upon anyone. He points more to the Father than to himself: "The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son

does likewise" (Jo. 5:19). The entire Bible is this way. It is not so much inspired information that it gives us. It is literature that stirs the deeper levels of personality by involving us in the drama of suffering and compassion, so that we find ourselves awed by its relevance to the human predicament. When we read of the greatest life ever lived, the struggles of a community growing in Christlikeness, the agony of the great apostle who had pressing upon him "the care of all the churches"—the fight that he fought, the race that he finished, the faith he kept,—there is something about it all that convinces us that it is God's Word from the Beyond. It has that special something about it that calls for no apologetic, and we find ourselves saying *that's for me!* And *that* is the true nature of biblical authority.

Finally, I must say that the Bible never really becomes authoritative except to him who hungers for God. Despite all his efforts, Jesus was never accepted as authoritative to those Pharisees who both resented and rejected him. One of the most remarkable of Jesus' saying is along this line: "If any man wills to do God's will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority" (Jn. 7:17). If anyone *wills* he will know. It follows that so long as one is not willing, and is insincere before God, he will not know. There is no need to show light to a blind man, but once he is caused to see he can rejoice in the light. One blind man who was caused to see said, quite knowingly, "If this man were not from God, he could do nothing" (Jn. 9:33). Jesus pointed him to God, and this is the essence of our Lord's authority: *his power to enable men to see God.*

The *source* of biblical authority is therefore in God and in His son, Jesus. By their appointment of prophets and apostles this authority is expressed through the scriptures. God thus speaks to us through the Bible. Since the deity has no vocal cords and does not "speak" except in terms of human language, with whatever limitations that may impose, we must necessarily interpret the Bible as we would other ancient literature. This has to mean that each man's conscience is the final court of appeal as to what God is saying to him in the scriptures, unless indeed we are willing to allow others to serve as the final arbiter as to what the Bible means. In that sense, then, each one of us is his own authority, for each one is responsible under God to make that response to the scriptures that is consistent to his own mind and heart.

Returning now to the founders of our Movement, it is appropriate to ask to what extent these views of biblical authority are consistent with theirs, even though we all agree that consistency is not necessary for our own personal quest of truth. Limiting myself only to Alexander Campbell, I see my thinking as consistent with his in the following respects.

1. Influenced as he was by Francis Bacon and John Locke, Campbell insisted that the student must approach the scriptures inductively rather than deductively. He believed in the kind of free inquiry that was void of all presuppositions in approaching the biblical

text. The "textuary divines," as he called them in his more ungracious moments, have their premises already in hand, and so they proceed to find those texts that will justify their conclusions. He laid down a standard for biblical study that hardly anyone could be expected to follow perfectly, including himself: "I have endeavored to read the scriptures as though no one had read them before me; and I am as much on my guard against reading them today, through the medium of my own views yesterday, or a week ago, as I am against being influenced by any foreign name, authority, or system, whatever" *(Chris. Bap. 1826,* p. 201).

2. Even though he lived before the dawn of modern scientific biblical criticism, his own grammatio-historical approach to the scriptures was well in advance of his time. His passion for giving the public a new translation of the living oracles is an instance of this. He had no fear of an honest, vigorous examination of the Bible in its historical and cultural setting. He laid down principles of interpretation that alarmed the clergy, such as: "the same philological principles, deduced from the nature of language of other books, are to be applied to the language of the Bible" *(Christian System,* p.4).

3. He did not confuse some theory of verbal inspiration with biblical authority. In fact, he rejected *verbal* inspiration for *plenary* inspiration. While the scriptures are completely (plenary) inspired, there is no evidence that every word is given of the Holy Spirit. He said: "We must regard these writers as using their own modes of speech, and as selecting their own words, both in speaking and writing; yet so plenary was their inspiration that they could not select an improper term or a word not in accordance with the mind of the Spirit. That they did select different words to express the same ideas cannot be disputed." *(Mill Harb,* 1834, p. 200). Rejecting the dictation theory commonly held, he believed the Spirit directed the writers in the selection of the sources, but left them free to write out of their own individual uniqueness.

Nor was Campbell alarmed by a possible error here and there in the scriptures. Asked in the Campbell-Owen debate about the reference to Jeremiah in Mt. 27:9 instead of Zechariah, he explained that a writer could easily make such a mistake since the Old Testament was divided in a different way then; but even if it be an error it in no wise affects the credibility of Matthew's testimony concerning Jesus, he insisted.

4. He makes a place for what I have called the subjective aspect of authority. After a long list of erudite rules for interpretation, he lays down what he calls the one "indispensable" rule, which is that the reader of the scriptures must come within "the understanding distance." There is a hearing distance and a speaking distance in ordinary affairs that we all understand, he observes, but in reference to God and the Bible there is an understanding distance, beyond which one never understands, however learned he may be. One must enter the circle of the understanding distance, of which God is the center and humility is the circumference, he says. Just as the sun reaches out to give us light and we

must open our eyes to benefit from it, so the light of the scriptures are for us only if we open our hearts and minds to its influence. If one's only intent is to know the will of God, then he has "a sound eye" and a knowledge of God will be easy for him. *(Christian System,* p. 5).

5. He believed the Bible to be the complete, authoritative Word of God, and that it would be just as foolish to expect God to give another sun to illuminate the heavens as to give another Bible. "In the Christian religion there are no new discoveries, no new improvement to be made. It is already revealed, and long since developed in the apostolic writing," he told the readers of the *Christian Baptist* in 1826 (p. 168). And he put his finger on the main point of biblical authority when he wrote: "As God kindly revealed himself, his will, and our salvation in human language, the words of human language, which he used for this purpose, must have been used by his Spirit in the commonly received sense amongst mankind generally; else it could not have been a revelation, for a revelation in words not understood in the common sense is no revelation at all" *(Chris. Bap.,* 1823, page 121).

As divided as our Movement now is, we have a common heritage of accepting the scriptures as the authoritative Word of God. It is amiss for any one of our groups to account for our differences on the ground of "a difference in attitude toward the Bible," as if only our own wing were the only ones who believe in the authority of the scriptures. All of us in the Restoration Movement believe in the authority of the Bible! Our divisions may come from making too much of our varying interpretations, especially our interpretation of the *silence* of the scriptures, or from a lack of that love that unites, but they are not because some of us accept the Bible as our rule of faith and practice and others of us do not. We are all justified in pointing each other, and the whole of the Christian world, to the scriptures as the church's only norm in religion, bu t we do not have the right to impose our opinions and our own personal interpretations either upon each other or upon others, thus making them tests of fellowship. We are all part of a tradition that has appealed to a "thus saith the Lord" and our forebears have pointed to those things in the Bible that are "clearly and distinctly" set forth as the basis of communion. I would urge that we preserve that legacy. *—the Editor*

(This paper was presented at the Theological Forum, North American Christian Convention, July 24,1974.)

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NASHVILLE UNITY FORUM

The tenth one, and the last of this particular series, will be at Bethany, probably the first few days of July (but this will be announced later), and we hope that many of you will make plans to be there. This was the ninth one in as many years, and it was held on the campus of Scarritt College and in Moorman Auditorium of the Upper Room, across from the college. We had about 100 people from 17 states, plus many from middle Tennessee. We were filled to capacity the night Pat Boone appeared, and while the attendance from Nashville itself was disappointing we had good crowds and fine interest all the way.

Stanley Hime of the Otter Creek Church of Christ was the coordinator, and he did an effective job for us, especially in getting Nashville well represented on the program, though all the King's horses and all the King's men could not prevail upon the mainline CofC leadership in Nashville to join in.

David Bobo, who ministers to one of the Churches of Christ in Indianapolis, and Pat Boone spoke on unity the first night. Pat made the point that unless homes are one congregations are not likely to be. David gave his projection of what the united church will be like, a presentation that should be published. The second night gave us Perry Gresham of Bethany and Bob Fife of Milligan, with Robert Neil, an elder at Belmont Church of Christ, leading us gloriously in singing. Perry observed that the heart of our Movement was an effort to rediscover Pentecost, which he contrasted with the confusion of Babel. Bob, like Bobo the night before, gave us his view of the united church. He cited instances already in operation in which all our people could be working together.

Especially impressive among the day sessions was the one on faith and opinion, chaired by F. L. Lemley of Bonne Terre, MO and with Edward Fudge of Athens, AL and Thomas Langford of Lubbock, TX as participants. The three men represented very diverse backgrounds and yet they handled the topic in a most helpful manner, and they came near agreeing. Tom readily acknowledged his "non-class" position to be in the area of opinion, leaving matters of faith to be those things that are clearly and distinctly set forth in scripture. Ed was not so clear in reference to his "non-cooperation" background, but his irenic spirit and sincerity helped us all in thinking through a difficult problem.

The other day sessions were more or less personal testimonials in reference to freedom in Christ. Ed Neely Cullum, Max Foster, Fred Hall, James L. Barton, Clair E. Berry, A. A. Boone (Pat's father), Hall Crowder, Frank Allen Dennis, who is now known by some of our readers as "the professor with the poodle" of Mississippi fame, all edified us. Here we have a Disciple, an Independent Christian, a mainline CofC, a pre mill CofC, charismatic CofC, and I don't know what all. But all of them talked to us, shared with us, told us experiences about freedom in the Lord. It was beautiful!

Many of us out-of-towners stayed together on campus and dined together in the mess hall. We all agreed that we need more of such togetherness. There were tours of the Upper Room, where the Methodists have graciously included Alex Campbell in their historic stained-glass window and where we saw the Lord's Supper carved in wood. And we toured the Disciples of Christ Historical Society. It warmed my heart to see Claude Spencer sharing the goodies of the Society with people of several different backgrounds, all of them basking together in our glorious history. Ouida, Ben, Philip, and **I,** along with friends from the Forum, visited with Pat and Shirley in the home of Archie and Margaret Boone, Pat's parents, which rounded off a beautiful experience in the Athens of the South, or should I say the New Jerusalem.

Which reminds me of one of the gayer moments. In a question period someone asked Perry Gresham where he supposed Alex Campbell would be if he were alive today. Perry replied, "In Nashville, of course!"

A few days later at the North American Christian Convention in Anaheim I told Mildred Welshimer Phillips about the Forum, especially that scene of old Claude opening up our history to all these different backgrounds of our Movement. Nothing would do for her but for me to make the same spiel to the luncheon meeting of the Disciples of Christ Historical Society, which is always part of that convention. Making me do a thing like that is about like throwing Brer Rabbit into the briar patch!

This is not a page from my travel diary. Beyond Nashville there is Anaheim, then Mexico City to the World Convention of Churches of Christ, and then to several places in Illinois and Indiana. All this deserves special treatment, which I hope to do in my text.—*the Editor*

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OFFICE NOTES

A brother in Colorado wants to contact a brother who is in the cross-country trucking business, who owns his own rig. He is interested in getting into business and wants to talk to someone he can trust. For now he wants to keep his plans confidential, so if you'll contact us, we'll send the communication on to him.

A retired chaplain in the Air Force is rendering an exciting service by providing church record supplies, which helps busy pastors and secretaries to keep up with the flock. He has some good stuff, and he'll send you descriptions if you are interested. Address: Basic Church-Record Supplies, Box 866, Lawndale, Cal. 90260.

As our masthead indicates, this paper is not published in July and August. So this September issue is No. 7 for the year, following June, No. 6. Each issue is 20 pages, making a 200-page volume by year's end. The volume for 1973 will be combined with the one for 1974 into a 400-page book, entitled *The Church of Christ: Then and Now,* with preface and table of contents, and pictorial dust jacket. After a few years, these will not likely be available, so you should place your order now, but you need send no money. Back volumes are still available at $3.50 (single volumes 1966-1970) and $4.50 (double volume 1971-72).

Heaven Help Us is a work on the Holy Spirit in your life, written by Carl Ketcherside and published by Christian Standard. It is only $2.95, which should be the bargain of the year, for what subject could mean more to you, and who is likely to write about it with more grace and clarity? If you haven't Carl's last bound volume (1973), *The Question Box,* which answers a lot of questions about baptism, we'll include one of those for only $3.00.

If you have even passing interest in the Restoration Movement (and unless you are a cut flower, it should be more than that), then *The Declaration and Address* is a must. This is the magna charter of our Movement, written by Thomas Campbell, and probably never appreciated by anyone as much as by his own son, Alexander. But a lot of us are close seconds. You be another. It is almost a sin not to own, study, and cherish this sturdy and beautiful volume at only $1.50. It also contains the *Last Will and Testament* by Barton Stone.

A number of our readers are satisfied owners of Stan Paregien's *Thoughts on Unity,* which is a compilation of articles by 19 different representatives of the Restoration Movement, with a picture and short biography of each. It makes a good book to hand to one concerned over our divisions. $3.95 in hard cover.

How about counseling yourself and others under the direction of the Holy Spirit? Maybe that is not as wild as you think, especially after you read [,0 *ve Therapy,* by Paul D. Morris, who happens to believe that love is the one thing lacking in modern psychiatry, which has only partial success at best. The author was born in poverty, soon orphaned, with his mother spending her life in a mental institution. Affected by all this, he has come to the place in his study of counseling that he is convinced that the Word of God is the great medicine chest for mental illnesses. He tells you how to write prescriptions for yourself from the Bible! Only $2.95 in paperback.

God's Strategy in Human History, by a team of British authors (foreword by F. F. Bruce), is a treatment of the eternal conflict between good and evil that deals with the battlefield, opponents, weapons. It theorizes about God's dealings with Israel and the future of the church. Professor Bruce says the authors have made a real effort to determine what the scriptures really say. Only $3.95 in paper.

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READERS' EXCHANGE

We continue to enjoy *Restoration Review.* We look forward to every issue. I especially enjoyed (and related to) your article on "Why I Am Not a Liberal."—*Charles Turner,* 947 *Bayland, Houston, Texas 77099.*

Let a man make statements concerning the kingdom in the New Testament, and examine them carefully in the light of their context, and judge whether without exception the church answers to the requirements of each passage. If the kingdom here spoken of is simply the church, would it not be peculiar to say as in Mt. 5:3: "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven"? Is the church theirs? Or does he refer to the church when He says that "many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of Heaven" (Luke 12:32)? Would it not be an awkward promise "to give you the church"?—*James M. Roe Miller, 113 N. Taylor St., Gainesville, Tex. 76240.*

Your article about C. of C. profs educated by the Baptists was a jewel. I took the liberty to Xerox the article and mail it to a bunch of C. of C. friends and Baptists, including A.C.C. profs and S.W.B.T.S. profs. I got a very nice, warm, long letter back from one S.W.B.T. prof who said he was sharing it with others. I have four years of A.C.C. and four years of S.W.B.T.S. I loved your article and your line of reasoning.—*Chaplain Roger Tate, U.S. Air Force, 414 Aviation, Apt. 13, Universal City, Texas 78148.*

Year before last, a Church of Christ friend gave me a year's sub to *Restoration Review.* I am not a member of the Church of Christ myself, but nevertheless I have enjoyed most of the articles very much. I grew up in the Presbyterian Church in Ohio and stayed Presbyterian till the end of last year. I now considcr myself non-denominational just Christian (or believer). I was only a nominal Christian till about 3 or 4 years ago when I had a "born again" experience. Praise God! Then, nearly a year later I received the baptism in or with the Holy Spirit and since then have been filled with joy as though rivers of living water flowed forth from me! Hallelujah! Are there any free Church of Christ churches in Austin?—*James B. Hoffman, 11900 Indianhead Dr., Austin, Texas 78753.*

After seven years in Washington D. C., it is my observation that the Church of Christ is declining in membership and other measurable statistics. However, I feel that there have never been greater opportunities for the spreading of the gospel than now. The real challenge is not so much people to baptize, but rather to integrate newborn Christians into the local congregation without all the traditional hangups.—*Joe Hale, 6100 Hibbling Ave., Springfield, Virginia 22150.*

We have always enjoyed *Restoration Review.* as a publication that expressed refreshing and stimulating ways of looking at biblical subjects. It fulfills the need for a periodical that examines certain issues in an unconventional way, as far as the Church of Christ is concerned.—*Paul Briley, 222 S. 3rd Ave., Casper, Wyoming 82601.*

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